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SUBJECT: ADVANI PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR U.S.-INDIA RELATIONSHIP

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a June 11 meeting with Under Secretary Burns, India's Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani pledged common cause with the new Congress-led government, particularly on the principal foreign policy issues of Afghanistan and Pakistan and on a strengthened relationship with the United States. Burns thanked Advani for the role he and his party had played in helping to build a foundation for partnership over the last decade, and he sought Advani's views on the BJP's priorities and agenda for the coming years. During a long exchange on Pakistan, Advani recalled his party's leadership of efforts to improve the India/Pakistan relation under PM Vajpayee and President Musharraf: "It was so much easier then, when you knew who was in charge." Advani's tone was conciliatory, positive and hopeful about continued growth in the U.S.-India partnership. End Summary.

Pakistan

¶2. (SBU) Advani noted that the situation in Pakistan was clearly of the highest priority for both India and the United States. He also flagged concerns about Nepal, illegal immigration from Bangladesh and the fate of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

¶3. (SBU) Advani highlighted recent statements by former Pakistani President Musharraf that the ISI was "linked" with terrorists and other comments by current Pakistani President Zardari that he feared nuclear weapons would fall into the hands of the Taliban. The 81 year-old Advani stated that India's problem with Pakistan is that no one knew who was really in control. Advani remembered fondly his interactions with Benazir Bhutto: "When I first met her, in the eighties, she asked if we should speak in Sindhi." Born in Karachi, Advani added that he had spoken twice with Zardari once after Benazir's death, and again after his inauguration. Advani noted that regardless of these calls and a meeting he had with the Sharif brothers, he had no real relationship with them.

¶4. (SBU) Advani described Pakistan after the November 2008 Mumbai attacks as "in complete denial." He recounted how reluctant the Pakistani government was to accept that the attacks had originated in Pakistan and worried about the release of Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed.

¶5. (SBU) Advani also raised concerns about U.S. aid to

Pakistan and how well we were monitoring its use. Burns responded that we took very seriously our responsibility to monitor aid to Pakistan -- as did our Congress -- and we would do all we could to ensure the aid was used to strengthen Pakistan's capabilities to fight terrorism. Advani asked Burns to use U.S. influence over Pakistan, particularly the Army, to end its antagonistic approach to India.

#### U.S. India Cooperation and Indian Domestic Priorities

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¶16. (SBU) Turning to the bilateral relationship, Burns told Advani he looked forward to increased cooperation between the two countries in areas outside security, such as agriculture, education and energy. Advani agreed and stated that India's two most prominent domestic priorities are improving the farming sector and decreasing unemployment. Noting U.S. assistance during the Green Revolution, Burns asked how we could cooperate on agriculture. Advani responded that more small-scale irrigation was needed as well as a better energy infrastructure. All areas were open for more cooperation, Advani continued. He noted that "the world's largest democracy and the world's strongest" shared a "natural relationship." Even on issues where we may have disagreements, we handled them in a respectful manner.

#### Indian Foreign Policy Consensus

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¶17. (SBU) Advani stated that the BJP and the Congress Party share a common approach with few differences on the top foreign policy issues, including the U.S.-India bilateral relationship, international terrorism, Pakistan and Afghanistan. While disappointed with the BJP's drubbing in the recent parliamentary elections, Advani was encouraged that the Congress Party had fared well enough not to be at the mercy of smaller parties in an unstable alliance.

¶18. (U) This message was cleared by Under Secretary Burns.  
BURLEIGH